

## **Women's Paid and Unpaid Work in Unorganised Sector**

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### **Abstract**

Women contribute significantly to national development by performing paid and unpaid work. In doing so, they also struggle to combine their roles to look after their families. Women in the unorganised sector as well as countless other women invariably also do a wide variety of "invisible" work, and often shoulder the dual burden of paid and unpaid labour. The unpaid contribution of many of these activities associated with house hold maintenance, provisioning and reproduction- which are typically performed by women or female children-tends to be ignored in calculations for labour (Sharmila Joshi, 2007).

With the increasing participation of women in unorganised sector work, they are spending more time at the work site. If the conditions are bad for male workers, women suffer more managing the triple burden of work, home and childcare. Health, Workplace and family are the three components, which plays a significant role in the life of a woman. The women from organized sector have an option and afford to forgo their domestic burden by purchasing the labour, which is not possible for the economically underprivileged women. Therefore, it is necessary to study the above mentioned components and conditions of women engaged in unorganised sector. Though the work of women is treated as manual and monotonous, still they are not less burdened with that of male workers. Stress at the work site and manual work at home which is unpaid work has compounded the problem of women's health. The patriarchal attitude, gender discrimination, work nature and other problems faced at work place and home may contribute to her low self-image in her mind. In view of the above, the paper is an outcome of a primary study conducted (in Barak Valley of Assam) to bring forward the paid and unpaid work burden of women engaged in brick kiln industry. The study mainly focuses on understanding gender based division of work both in work place and the household; to evaluate the impact of work environment and unpaid household work burden on the perceived health of women laborers. The subjects for the study constituted 300 women brick kiln workers drawn from 30 selected brick kiln industries situated in the three districts of Barak Valley (namely Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj), Assam. A multi stage stratified random sampling technique was adopted for selecting 10 brick kiln industries. From each industry 10 women workers were selected purposively. Thus a total of 300 women were interviewed using interview schedules.

The major findings of the study reveals that the enhanced participation of women in the paid workforce does not mean that there is any reduction in the burden on women to maintain and manage the household. More women are now spending far more time in the labour force than before, but they still invariably have to take responsibility for home and family care, consequently sacrificing their leisure and personal care time. Workers in the Brick kiln industry comprise one of the poorest and weakest segments of the society. The vulnerability of these women can be manifested in terms of practicing discriminatory wages, lack of childcare facilities at the work place. Paid and unpaid work load is also posing threat to women's physical and mental health. Given the strenuous nature of work with no commensurate wage rates, the uncertainty, and appalling working conditions coupled with childcare burden makes the women the worst sufferers. For the women workers in the brick kiln industry the present occupational profile, the gender based division of labour and the working conditions, all add to their deteriorating health. This in turn takes a toll on their health and, working capacity and productivity.

**Keywords:** Paid and Unpaid Work, Unorganised Sector, Gender based Division of Labour, Perceived Health.

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### **Introduction**

With growing demographic pressure and mechanization of agricultural operations, the avenues of employment for agricultural labour are also declining. This phenomenon has resulted in the casualization of labour which had made rural labour circulatory in nature generating several streams of migration. Thus forcing a large number of them to seek employment outside the organised sector and join the unorganised sector. Poor women are invisible workers and the invisibility is thrust upon them by confining them to the so called subordinate roles. The statistics thus collected even by the official agencies largely categorises them as non-workers. They are classed as weaker sex, confined to strenuous and monotonous work and withdraw voluntarily from the labour force as and when the situation demands (Bannerjee, 1988).

The accounting of females as workers in the census and the NSSO suffers from serious enumeration and recording drawbacks. According to Mitra (1981) the underreporting of female workforce participation rates in the Census varies from 30-40 percent. He estimates that the participation of females in the informal sector is as high as 49 percent as against 1 to 17 percent in the case of males. Jain and Chand (1982) also found that the measurement of female labour force participation and analysis suffer from gross under enumeration, inadequate attention to unpaid family labour, own production and household work and relationship between them.

As per the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 55th Round on Employment and Unemployment in India (1999-2000), in rural areas the female (formal) work

participation rate was highest in the age group of 40-44 years, at 58.6%, and was above 50% in the age group 30-54 years.

In urban areas the female (formal) work participation rate was the highest in the age group 35-39 years, at 28.5%, and was 28.3% in the age group of 40-44 years. More women are now spending far more time in the labour force than before, but they still invariably have to take responsibility for home and family care, consequently sacrificing their leisure and personal care time.

Given that women traditionally are responsible for household work and caring for others, when women enter the paid workforce in large numbers and, some negative consequences may arise. These include the heavier burden placed on women, who often must continue to shoulder the entire responsibility for home and family in addition to their outside job.

The implication of women's unpaid work is manifested in increasing poverty and vulnerability. The time women spend on unpaid work is time they cannot devote to paid work or to education.

The lack of recognition given to unpaid work is a chief contributor to women's higher rates of poverty, and possibly mistreatment, around the world. The invisibility of, and low value given to, the work done by a vast majority of the women across the globe, particularly in countries like India, is an issue which is seldom addressed by policy makers.

### **The Brick Kiln Industry**

The Brick kiln industry occupies a very significant place in the unorganised sector of our nation. With the advent of building booms in the urban areas, brick-making in India has become a significant industry in the unorganised sector, confined mainly to rural and semi-urban areas. This industry is characterized by aspects like instability, short duration. A large number of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labourers are absorbed in this industry. Nearly half the workers in this industry are women. The state of working conditions of the brick kiln workers is miserable.

### **Methodology**

Exploratory research design was employed keeping in view of the objectives of the study. The subjects for the study constituted 300 women brick kiln workers drawn from 30 selected brick kiln industries situated in the three districts of Barak Valley of Assam. A multi stage stratified random sampling technique was used for selecting 10 brick kiln industries. From each industry 10 women workers were selected purposively. Thus, a total of 300 women respondents were interviewed using interview schedule followed by focused group discussions to elicit the required information from the respondents.

### **Brick Kiln Industry in Barak Valley**

Brick kiln industry in Barak Valley is a major employer of unskilled and semi skilled labour. There are around 150 brick kilns are running in the three districts of Barak Valley (viz. Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimgunj) employing on an average 70 to 80 Workers in each industry. The process of brick production largely requires both skilled and unskilled labour. The work at Brick kilns is a seasonal activity occurring largely between October to the beginning of monsoon season (i.e. up to May). The work in this industry attracts migrant labourers

from surrounding rural areas and forms a large bulk of inter-state as well as intra state migratory labour force. Due to the lack of opportunities for work in agriculture, labourers migrate through brokers to work in brick kilns.

### **Demographic Profile**

The personal profile of women shows that they belong to the lowest economic strata of the society and are landless labourers. The near absence of upper caste women could be explained by their more privileged position in the society. An overwhelming majority (32 percent) fall in the age group of 26-30 years followed by the age group of 19-25 years (26 percent). This shows that the nature of work in brick kilns requires stamina of able bodied. Though children were not found working as labourers, but adolescents were seen engaged in brick kiln industry both in moulding bricks and transporting bricks. Same types of findings were reported by the Labour Bureau, Government of India in its survey (1982) on brick kilns in the Union Territory of Chandigarh, Haryana and Punjab.

Regarding educational status of the women brick kiln labourers, a large majority of the respondents (84.7 percent) have never gone to school. Very negligible portion of labour force could reach up to high school. The reason to this may be attributed to the fact that these small portions of the respondents who have studied are the first generation literates.

It was found that nearly half of the labour force in brick kilns comprises of migrants. Although principle force of migration is economic motive, yet the study shows that women tend to move to nearby places than to far-off places i.e. women are resorting to inter-district migration than inter-state migration. Inter-state migration is mostly resorted by the men from Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh.

### **Gender Based Division of Labour in Brick-Making Process**

Within the occupational structure, participation of women in brick-making process is characterised by distinct division of labour. Though, predominantly men are involved in moulding, stacking and firing, an overwhelming majority of the respondents are engaged in loading and unloading work which is performed by the labourers from the local areas. Little above 15 percent of the respondents engaged in moulding bricks are the migrants. In case of transporting bricks from one place to the other both men and women are involved. Men make use of wooden carts or cycles, whereas women carry the bricks over their head. Continuity of work solely depends upon the hard labour of the migrants. The present findings are in line with those of the Gulati (1979).

Though the working hours are not rigid and the payment of wages are made based on the piece rate, it was found that an overwhelming fifty percent of the women respondents were working for nine hours a day, followed by one-third respondents working for eight hours a day. In contrast, nearly one fifth of the respondents were working for 12 hours a day. This is more relevant to the migrants who are staying at the site and are giving more time as they are in proximity to their work place.

Brick-making involves a low technology and is characterised by distinct division of labour. Starting from moulding till extraction of the baked bricks from the kiln, the division of labour based on the nature of work is seen. The molders are

the largest concentrate of workers and they come at the beginning of the season i.e., in the month of October/November and a month later the other category of workers follow. Once the other category of workers follow the work at the kiln becomes a simultaneous activity. The sequential track ends once the moulders have prepared bricks to fill half the kiln. The job of moulders is laborious and forms the base of the kiln. The pace at which the kiln will operate, the number of rounds that the kiln would make in a season and the optimization of production all largely depends on the speed at which the molders work. Though only men are involved in molding, stacking, firing, whereas women are involved in carrying bricks from one place to the other. However, the study revealed that migrant women are also involved in moulding. Men also engage in transporting bricks from one place to the other. Men carry bricks by wooden carts or bicycles where as women carry the bricks over their head. The employers maintain a register to keep the account of piece work of the workers to facilitate payment of wages as per their work.

The brick-making process involves the following:

1. Digging the Earth & making clay brick: The process of brick-making involves digging the earth and making bricks from the clay. They prepare the pits, dig the raw earth, make the dough by continuously sprinkling water on the earth and shape the rounds of mud into bricks with the help of wooden mould provided by the brick kiln owner. The shaping of round is either done by women or children. The process of moulding is mostly done by men. But in few cases moulding is also done by migrant women. After the bricks are moulded, women and children (in addition to the work that they do along with the *pathera* in other processes) carry them to be spread in the sun. They turn the bricks on all sides for even drying.
2. Transporting the clay-bricks to the kiln: The division of labour is reflected in terms of assigning the task of carrying the bricks from one place to the other. Transporting of unbaked dried bricks from the trench to the kilns is done by both men and women. Men are engaged in carrying bricks from the trenches located at far of places. Women are engaged in carrying the bricks on their heads from the nearby trenches. Men use cycles or wooden carts to carry the bricks whereas. This category of labourers are also paid on piece rate i.e. per thousand bricks. It is also deemed that the carrying of bricks is an unskilled job.
3. Stacking the clay-bricks in the kiln *Beldar* (Stacker): One who arranges the bricks in the kiln for firing which is called *bharai*. This process is recognized as the skilled job, which is done by men only. They are paid per thousand bricks.
4. Covering the stacked bricks with mud & gravel: *Rapaswala* (Brick-coverer preparatory to firing): *Rapaswale* (they level the stacked bricks with earth and make them ready for the burning process to begin.
5. Firing the clay-bricks *Jalaidar* (Brick-firer): These workers fire the kiln and watch continuously if the bricks are being properly baked. This is done mainly by men.
6. Unloading' or retrieving the bricks from the kiln & Sorting *Nikasiwala* (Burnt brick un-loader or retriever & Sorter): They are employed to take out the baked bricks from the kilns and sort and stack them according to the

grade of bricks. Both men and women are involved. Again men carry the bricks on their bicycles/wooden carts and women on their heads.

### Monthly Income

Monthly income of the family from the brick kilns also reveals that more than half of the respondents have total monthly income ranging between 1001-3000, more than one fifth of the respondents earn below Rs. 1000. Another one-fifth of the respondents have monthly income ranging between 3001-5000, only a negligible portion of the respondents could earn a monthly income which is above Rs. 5000. Overall earnings of the families engaged in brick kiln industry are not attracting. The earnings of the family is not in consonance with the amount of time and labour they are putting in. The earnings are meager even to fulfill their basic necessities of life.

### Workers Share to Household Income

Women's contribution in terms of running the family is very much visible in terms of her share in the family income. In terms of respondents share to total family income it was found that a majority of the respondents (i.e. more than 78 percent) are contributing 25 to 50 percent of the household income. Another 14.33 percent of the respondents are contributing less than 25 percent of the household income. Only 5.33 percent of the respondents are sharing 50 to 75 percent of the household income. Remaining less than two percent of the respondents (1.67) are contributing hundred percent of the household income (These families are the women headed families).

### Pattern of Spending

To assess the extent to which women workers have the right to retain their earning and spend according to their own choice, relevant information from the respondents were collected through interview schedules reveals that 20 percent of the respondents taking all the sample together could retain their weekly earning in their own hands and thereby enjoy the freedom of spending the money according to their felt needs and wishes (This number is including the female headed households). About 35 percent of the respondents reported that they could keep a portion of their income in their hands and spend the money according to their own choices. They further revealed that they had to hand over the rest to their husband. Those respondents could enjoy the freedom of spending to some extent. About 45 percent of the respondent reported that they had to handover their entire weekly earnings to their husbands or other senior male members of the family. They did not enjoy any right on their own earnings as they could not spend the money when they felt it necessary.

Overall picture which is thus obtained in this regard was that only a small percentage of the respondents had the right to retain their earnings wholly and spend the same according to their own choice. Among the remaining respondent some could enjoy limited freedom in the matter of spending a portion of their own earnings, while others did not have any freedom in this regard.

Aforesaid picture, as we could notice, was in sharp contrast to the picture that was available for the male labourers who spend a considerable portion of their own income or of the income of the family on consumption of liquor. It shows that women in their familial domain enjoys lower than that of male counterparts. Firstly, male domination in the families of

women workers with regard to decision making was found. That is, women workers were found not participating equally with their male counterparts in decision-making process within the families. Secondly, it was found that women workers share in the right to spend in the sample area was not at par with men's share in the right to spend. Thirdly, with regards to savings, it was found that predominant women engaged in brick kilns hardly could save anything out of their earnings. Their earnings were exhausted to manage their day to day consumptions. This shows the vulnerability of women both at work place and at home.

Thus, the working condition of women workers in the sample brick kilns was also found to be wanting in many respects. Unable to entitle various essential facilities in work place like crèche facility had created additional hardships for women.

### **Household Unpaid Work Burden**

Working women have multiple roles to play. According to Ekkelof (1991: 26-27), 'Very often, women are stretched to the breaking point, pulled between the demands of working life and domestic commitments'. The National Commission on Self-employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector (1988) stated that in order to understand occupational health aspects, it is necessary to have a detailed examination of women's work and its effects in terms of physical and mental health. It is also important to analyze their conditions in terms of physical stresses, postural position and their effects, occupational health-related problems. Influence of stress factors on psychological conditions of women working in various establishments and industrial houses, and identifying different variables such as number of children, family relations, demands of work and role variety also need to be studied (Kaila 1993).

Work and domestic burden are compounding determinants for developing various health related disorders for women. The brick kiln labourers do tedious work in a given whole day which affect their physical and mental wellbeing. The major responsibilities at home includes household maintenance i.e. the responsibility of cooking food, cleaning and maintenance of the house, taking special care of the children, aged and disabled persons in the family.

Women's health is determined by the working conditions at work place and the work burden at home. Work burden and domestic burden are compounding determinants for developing various illnesses. The health status of women depends upon indefinite working condition and term of services – this includes the working hours, rest of intervals, holidays and payments etc. which has got direct implications on women's health and morale.

Public investment in infrastructure like water and fuel can have positive social externalities in terms of educating the girl child and improving the health and nutritional aspects of the household. Studies noted that easy accessibility to drinking water facilities might lead to an increase in school enrolment particularly girls; in Madagascar, 83 percent of the girls who did not go to school spent their time collecting water, while only 58 percent of the girls who attended school spent time collecting water (Bredie and Beehary, 1998).

Incongruous living conditions i.e. access to basic facilities like sanitation, safe drinking water and other welfare amenities. Their access to health system and education including for their children plays a pivotal role in deciding their health status.

The brick kiln labourers do tedious work in a given whole day. It not only affect their physical wellbeing but also affect their mental health and are more prone to occupational health related disorders.

### **A typical day for the Migrant Family**

The day starts early for the kiln workers especially the moulders. The woman has to complete the cooking and washing by 6 am so that she can join her husband in the process of brick-making. While she is completing her housework, the man sprinkles water on the earth prepared the last evening into dough. He kneads it with his feet to make it more pliable. Sometimes children also help them in kneading. If there is a young daughter she may help the mother in cooking and the mother can help in breaking the clods of earth too. After the dough is ready the woman hands over the rounds (lumps) of mud and the man shapes them into bricks with the help of a wooden mould. He keeps the prepared bricks on the wooden planks. The women and the children work alongside and that is how the children to learn their work and grow up to be moulders themselves. Then the women and the children take the moulded bricks to spread in the sun while the man continues to mould. The bricks have to be turned on all sides for even drying. This work too is done by women and children. The morning shift is up to 2 pm. With a break for lunch the work is resumed in the afternoon. Before retiring for the day the earth is dug and dough is prepared for the next day's work. Women and children supervise the water channel while the men dig the earth with a shovel. At 6 p.m. the man relaxes, smoking and talking to his friends or just sitting on the cot in front of his hut, while the woman gets busy with the cooking of the evening meal and sleeps only after she has served the food and washed the utensils. This is the picture of minimum work roster on a kiln for a moulder, that is 12 hours. Field work show that very often the workers carry on till 7 pm having started at 5 in the morning, with an hour's rest in the afternoon.

The payment day is the holiday for the entire workers in the kiln. On this day also the migrants family work up to the noon and go for taking their weekly wages from the owner through their contractor.

### **Wake up Time and Sleeping Time**

A majority of the respondents (58 percent) wake up in the morning at around 5.00 am followed by 26.7 percentage of the respondents wake up at around 4.00 am. Another 15.3 percent of the respondents wake up at around 6.00 am. It was found that almost all the women stated that they wake up earlier than their male counterparts. The data shows that on a normal working day a majority of the respondents are able to sleep only between 9.00 pm to 5.00 am and rest for 8 hours only.

### **Household work performed at Morning and Night**

The survey collected comprehensive information on what are the household chores they perform apart from brick kiln work. The idea of undertaking such a study was to analyse the implication of paid and unpaid work on women. The one-day recall method was used for data collection. The collected data shows that the most important economic activity for women in all the age group are mostly household maintenance, management, care of siblings, sick, aged and disabled and other household activities, like cooking food, collecting water,



cleaning the house regularly. The care of siblings, assistance in cooking, fetching water, involvement of adolescents and children in the family were observed.

It could be noticed that the daily routine of the women brick kiln labourers in all the sample area were strikingly similar. They get up early in the morning and attend household assignments. They give the house and the front yard a good sweep-out. They fetch water from nearby wells or pumps of taps and cook the food for all family members. Then they serve the meal to their spouses and children and keep the meal for other family members if any. Moreover, they have to make arrangement to take Tiffin with them and their spouses. After completing all these tasks they themselves take meal, clean utensils and go out for work at 7 o'clock. After coming back home, again they remain busy with household works, such as taking care of children, cooking, cleaning of utensils etc. In addition to eight hours of strenuous manual work in the brick kiln, all the respondents have to discharge various household workers (as mentioned in the table) which require both time and labour. On the working days they hardly get any leisure after serving their two masters- one in the workplace and the other at home (i.e. family). On the holidays, in addition to performing daily works, they have to discharge some other tasks also. On those days, they have to bear the burden of other tasks like washing the clothes, house repairing and purchasing necessities. On those days, after a day's work, they get some leisure and prefer to spend the same by visiting neighbour's houses or other places by taking rest at home.

On paying a close look onto the tasks performed by women in the area of domestic responsibilities, it was found that women of the entire category (i.e. migrants and non-migrants) were invariably discharging their household obligations irrespective of their holding size.

We have established the fact that women have considerable work in the brick kiln industry and at home. After working in brick kiln industry on an average spend 10 to 12 hours working and have little leisure time as they have other duties such as taking care of children, cooking etc.

This brings us to a vital issue of women and dual roles. Women, who work out of the house for monetary gains in no way are relieved of their domestic commitment. As a consequence they have to perform a full day's work in the kiln and manage the home duties before and after their brick kiln work.

### Assistance in the Household Chores

The discussion with the respondents revealed that a majority of the respondents are not receiving help for the household work from their family members. Among the family members who contribute to the household work, the largest percentage comprises of respondents' daughters (26.67 percent) followed by the respondents' mothers (7.67 percent) and sister (5.67 percent). However, a very small percentage of the respondents have mentioned that husband assist them in household work (4 percent) followed by son (3.33 percent), mother in law (3 percent) and sister in law (2.67 percent). This show that the social tradition of daughter-in laws compulsorily carries out domestic duties of the household prevails.

Traditionally women had low status in India and as a consequence any aspect of her contribution was viewed as valueless and did not have status which it should have had. Given the intricacies and hypocrisies of the patriarchal system

even here there are exceptions. Cooking was always considered to be women's work. But where cooking was for a public occasion involving monetary consideration then women were not allowed and the men would take over. It is considered degrading and humiliating for a man to do household work and a wife is considered as the most competent one to do it. Men have always been able to accomplish many things with the help of women.

It is evident from the discussion with the respondents that those who have new entrants in the job market and those who have young children are the ones who find the dual roles conflicting. Similarly those who stay away from place of work and those who have no support from family members in household work is also have considerable conflict in performing the two roles.

There is a clear link between access support from other members for the unpaid work and time allocation of women, who have primary responsibility to ensure performance of household chores. Availability and accessibility of basic infrastructure like drinking water, sanitation etc. can lessen their burden and release their time locked up in care economy for the income-earning market economy activities. There are evidences in which girl children help their mothers in fetching water, the public investment in water supply infrastructure can release the time of girls to attend school or participate in income generating activities (Lekha S Chakraborty, 2005).

### Assistance Received by the Respondents in Childcare

A pertinent problem in the life of working women is childcare. The un-substitutable function of child care is mostly entrusted to women alone. The working women has to make many adjustments to her work role, home role and mother role to the best of her ability so that she does not neglect any of them. Women who have young children have to make alternate arrangements for looking after them while at work.

It was found from the study that the majority of women spend all their time after their brick kiln work with their family. This is because they do not wish to go out again after reaching home since they were away from home nearly 9 to 10 hours. They also have to catch up with the domestic chores and want to remain in the house with their family members. Very few could get domestic help from other family members to cope with their home chores. With the lack of assistance from the other family members, a majority of them continue to struggle with at home and at job.

The non-availability of childcare facilities is a source of anxiety for the respondents affecting their work efficiency. Almost all the respondents have expressed that there is no availability of crèche made by the brick kiln owner. The following text gives the details about the childcare arrangements made by the worker.



Source: Primary Data

### **Chart 1: Assistance received by the respondents in Childcare**

The trend shows that the percentage of non-helping family members are more than the percentage of helping ones. A majority of the respondents (25 percent) do not receive help from anybody. Around 11.7 percent receive help from their neighbors who look after their children. This shows the presence of social capital, where people are concern with each other and have belongingness. The daughter is the most prominent member of the family who helps in taking care of children (23.7 percent). In contrast only 3.3 percent of the respondents' children are taken care by their mother in law, followed by husband (1.7 percent) and son (0.7 percent). Around 9.3 percent of the respondents do not require childcare facility as they are grown up and 24 percent of the respondents do not have children.

Observation shows that at site, if the child is very young then the women carried the child on her waist while working. Once the child grows up s/he is freed and allowed to play at the site which could lead to many problems. This is always a source of anxiety and tension to the mothers. It also affects the health of the child. Apart from the question of health is lack of pre-school education, which these children are being deprived off. Thus it is clear that, the core household works which are to be discharged daily are mainly performed by the women members in their respective families. This fact is supported by the information collected from the sample respondents regarding the leisure that is normally available to them, vis-à-vis the same available to the male members of the family both on the working days and on holidays.

In terms of getting assistance from the other family members, certain trends are evident that majority of the respondents were not receiving any help from them in performing the household chores. Among the family members who extend assistance to the household work and childcare, daughter is the most prominent member. In very negligible cases the help is extended by the husband. This shows that the social tradition of females to compulsorily carry out the domestic duties of the household prevails.

Absence of childcare facilities like crèche is a source of anxiety and tension for the respondents having children. It also affects the work efficiency. Lack of crèche will also make the children to get exposed to dust and heat and are vulnerable to health hazards. Apart from the question of health, lack of pre-school education makes them deprived from right to education.

### **Health Status**

The health status of workers depends upon their indefinite working condition and term of services – this includes their working hours, rest intervals, holidays and payments. Incongruous living conditions i.e. access to basic facilities like sanitation, safe drinking water and other welfare amenities like access to healthcare system and education including for their children plays a pivotal role in deciding their health status.

The working environment of brick kiln industry is subjected to the uncertainties of nature and climatic conditions like rains, extreme heat, of cold weather, which is arduous and hazardous for the workers. This results in the direct impact on the workers i.e. attack of diseases while the indirect impact is sustained mental pressures culminating in health deterioration.

Workers in this industry are more susceptible to muscle strain, injuries from long periods of lifting head loads. It was found that they normally suffer from the ailments like stomach ache, head ache, body ache and fatigueness. Apart from fatigueness they are prone for respiratory problems due to inhalation of dust and to stress-related conditions as a result of target-oriented work, they ignore taking proper rest and engage for long working hours.

The common health related ailments reported by the respondents like fatigue, body ache, head ache, backaches, eye strain, stomach ache and anemia. It clearly shows that the respondents are suffering from physical pain in upper part of the body i.e. headache, pain in upper limbs, shoulder pain and neck pain. The probable reason of these ailments could be their nature of work at work place. Carry weight on head and lifting the weight to carry it would affect the upper part of the body. Secondly when the person does hard work without taking proper intake makes them more vulnerable.

### **Perceived Mental Health**

Mental health is not mere absence of mental illness. It is defined as 'a state of balance between the individual and the surrounding world, a state of harmony between one self and others. A coexistence between the realities of the self and that of other people and that of the environment,..' (Cited in Park 1998:13). The following text deals with the perception of the respondents with regards to adjustment at home, feelings and emotions with reference to household work and work place.

Due to strenuous nature of work, more than 30 percent women experienced illness. They have developed some problems relating their mental health in terms of adjustment at household. An analysis of reply of women to multi option questions shows that 19.67 percent of the respondents experienced mental exhaustion. Around 19 percent of the respondents agreed with the fact that they get irritation in day to day life and expressed that it is because of the nature of work they engage. 35 percent of the respondents experienced irritation while performing their duty of childcare. Around 32 percent of the respondents confessed that they are more prone to family conflicts. Around fifty percent of the respondents felt loss of control which lead to family conflicts because of reactive tendency to somebody's commented on her. The problem of mental imbalance is experienced by 37.34 percent of the respondents.

Even with the exhaustive nature of work, majority of the respondents gave negative responses which shows that most of the women workers could not express their problems. It was because of the fact that they were so socialized to their life situations that difficult situations are not seen as problems.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Although there is an increasing number of women in paid occupations, this does not seem to ensure their well-being and an improvement of quality of life. Women are being used only as a source of cheap labour. In these new types of employment, the burden on the women gets multiplied. Workers in the Brick kiln industry comprise one of the poorest and weakest segments of the society. The vulnerability of women can be manifested in terms of practicing discriminatory wages, lack of childcare facilities at the work place. Paid and unpaid work load is also posing threat to women's physical and mental health.

Given the strenuous nature of work with no commensurate wage rates, the uncertainty, and appalling working conditions coupled with childcare burden makes the women the worst sufferers. For the women workers in the brick kiln industry the present occupational profile, the division of labour and the working conditions, all add to their deteriorating health. This in turn takes a toll on their health and working capacity and productivity.

Thus, the study after analyzing the sharing pattern of responsibilities and rights among the two genders in the realm of families of the women brick kiln labourers could observe that an asymmetrical gendered division of labour in favour of men prevailing. Thus, women have larger share of responsibilities and lesser share of rights. This unequal gender relations in turn reflects the ongoing gender specific deprivation of women workers in their familial domains.

There is need to ensure *complementary fiscal services* for better gender sensitive human development as gender related issues cut across sectors. Fiscal policy redress inequalities in the intra household division of labour by providing infrastructure that can reduce the time allocation of women spent in unpaid care economy work.

The positive investment in the basic infrastructure facilities will pave a way towards improvement in standard of living and therefore the wellbeing of the household. Increased access to public delivery of basic amenities can improve the health status of women and children.

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